R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 015 074 RC 002 139

REVITALIZING RURAL AMERICA--PROBLEMS AND PROMISES.

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PUB DATE 23 OCT 67

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.32 6P.

DESCRIPTORS- COORDINATION, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES, EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, *EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, FEDERAL PROGRAMS, HOUSING, METROPOLITAN AREAS, *MIGRATION, NEEDS, PROBLEMS, *RURAL AREAS, *RURAL YOUTH, RURAL ECONOMICS, *RURAL DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, SLUMS, UNEMPLOYMENT, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION,

THE GROWING NATIONAL COMMITMENT TO THE REVITALIZATION OF RURAL AMERICA STEMS IN LARGE PART FROM RECENT PROBLEMS AND TROUBLES BEING EXPERIENCED IN URBAN AREAS. THESE PROBLEMS HAVE BEEN FURTHER AGGRAVATED BY THE RURAL TO URBAN MIGRATION WHICH TENDS TO INFLATE THE ALREADY OVERCROWDED CITIES. SOME SPECIFIC STEPS WHICH CAN BE TAKEN TO REVITALIZE OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES INCLUDE--(1) PROVISION OF MORE RURAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, (2) EXPANSION OF RURAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO INCLUDE MORE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, (3) INCREASE IN CREDIT FOR MORE RURAL BUSINESSES, (4) MORE AND IMPROVED RURAL HOUSING, (5) MORE EQUITABLE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION IN FEDERAL SPENDING AND PROCUREMENT PROGRAMS, (6) MORE EFFECTIVE COORDINATION OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS, (7) STRENGTHENING THE INSTITUTION OF THE FAMILY FARM. THIS SPEECH WAS PRESENTED AT THE NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE ON RURAL YOUTH, OCTOBER 23-26, 1967, WASHINGTON, D. C., SPONSORED JOINTLY BY THE U. S. DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE, INTERIOR, AND LABOR, OEO, AND THE PRESIDENT'S COUNCIL ON YOUTH OPPORTUNITY. (ES)

ED015074

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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General Session

Speech presented at
NATIONAL OUTLOOK CONFERENCE
ON RURAL YOUTH
October 23-26, 1967
Washington, D. C.

RECEIVED JAN 5 1968 NMSU E.R.I.C.

REVITALIZING RURAL AMERICA: PROBLEMS AND PROMISES

Honorable James B. Pearson
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First let me say what a pleasure it is for me to have the opportunity to appear before you this morning as a participant in the National Outlook Conference on Rural Youth. Second, I want to commend the Department of Agriculture and the other Departments of the Executive Branch for taking the initiative in sponsoring this most worthwhile conference. As a Member of Congress and also as a member of the minority party, I often find myself in disagreement with the Executive Branch. Therefore, it is particularly gratifying when we find ourselves on common ground.

The theme of this conference is, "New Prospects for Rural Youth." And I would suggest that the most promising new prospect for rural youth is the growing national commitment to the revitalization of rural America. It is too early to tell precisely where this new commitment will take us, but there is no mistaking the fact that there is growing national consensus on the need to stimulate the social and economic development of rural communities.

Rural America has been plagued with problems for a good many years, but ironically it is the great trouble in the urban rather than the rural areas which has finally caused us to more clearly see and understand the difficulties of the countryside and small towns.

The headlines of the past two or three years have made all of us painfully aware of the gigantic social and economic problems of urban America. And the term, "crisis of the cities," has come into common usage--a crisis described in terms of festering slums, rising crime rates, disintegrating families, chronic unemployment, racial tension, congested streets, polluted air and contaminated water.

We have now begun to recognize that many of these problems can be traced to the overcrowding of people and the excessive concentration of industry into a few great metropolitan centers. We are now beginning to realize that one of the most sensible and effective approaches to dealing with the crisis of the cities is to devise programs which will have the effect, hopefully, of slowing down or at least better controlling the great rural to urban migration which has for several decades continued to depopulate the countryside and small towns and to swell the population of our already overcrowded cities.

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The long, hot urban summer of 1967 has proven to be something of a catalyst, and we have begun to accept the idea that as we attempt to deal with the crisis of the cities the challenge is not simply to make the cities more efficient and more livable for more and more people, but how to keep more and more people from crowding into them.

Increasingly we are coming to realize that the old assumption that the migration from the country to the city represents the first step up the ladder of economic opportunity and social advancement simply isn't valid. For in reality far too many of the rural poor have crowded into the deteriorated sections of the large cities where they have become entrapped by their own lack of skills and by the pressure from the surrounding communities which seek to isolate the slum population in physical ghettos. What was to be the economic salvation became their prison, and ill-equipped to resist the depersonalizing forces of the city, their sense of personal and social responsibility is dulled. As the darkness of despair crowds out the light of hope they are demoralized and devoured by the contagion of their slum environment.

The rural exodus is not, of course, composed only of the poor and unskilled. It also includes the talented youth and the highly educated. And because of this the rural communities are being bled of their best human talent and most productive economic resources, in a cycle that continually feeds upon itself: the loss of people means a loss of local income and the gap between the actual tax base and the costs of public services is widened. Rural communities are already stretched to the limit to provide the public resources to educate their children, but after they have been educated the youth move to other areas because of a lack of local economic opportunity and social amenities.

But this in turn magnifies the problem because it is the talented and educated youth who could best provide the initiative and leadership to revitalize the community. Ironically, the rural areas are subsidizing the cities by the continuing export of their educated youth.

Thus, we have begun to see the whole question of our rural-urban balance in a new perspective. And because more and more people are dissatisfied with what they see we are now in the early stages of a national debate centering on the question of how we can better control and moderate the great rural migration to the cities. This debate will continue for several years and it will provide us an opportunity to discuss the characteristics of our present society and to raise fundamental questions about the type of society we want to build in the future. I am confident that out of this national debate will come a series of public policy decisions which will have a major influence on the development of our society for several decades to come. Hopefully those policy decisions will be the correct ones.

This then is the promise of the commitment to the goal of revitalizing rural America. Now let me turn to some of the problems that will be en-

countered as we seek to translate this general goal into practical reality.

The basic problem, I think, is represented by the challenge of the long-held beliefs and notions about what constitutes economic and social development. Despite the growing national acceptance of the idea that the rural to urban shift has gotten out of hand, I don't think we have really come to grips with many of the fundamental questions which we are going to have to deal with. For example, despite the uneasiness about the continuing concentration of people and economic resources into relatively few highly urbanized areas, we still tend to assume that the social and economic forces which underlie this concentration are not only inevitable but basically desirable over the long run. In short, we are still something of two minds on this subject. Our doubts about the undesirable effects of massive urbanization tend to be counterbalanced by a general expression of a century-old article of faith that this overall movement toward a highly concentrated, urbanized society represents economic and social progress.

And, of course, it is true that the forces which underlie the rural to urban migration do represent progress in a very meaningful sense. But the massive and hideous slums and the deteriorating rural communities which are the product of these forces are damning testimony to our inability to diffuse this progress throughout the entire population.

Thus, what I want to emphasize here is that if we are going to do anything more than pay lip service to the idea of achieving a more desirable rural-urban balance, we are going to have to discard many of our old attitudes and traditional dogmas and take a completely new look at the forces which have shaped our present social and economic structure.

In this effort to overcome these old stereotyped attitudes and beliefs, it is absolutely vital that we develop the best possible information and data. We already know a great deal, but we need to know a great deal more. We need to know in more precise detail those factors which influence industrial plant location. We need to know more about what conditions are necessary to assure efficient operations of industries outside our metropolitan areas. We need to know more about the economic costs and inefficiencies associated with the concentration of people and economic resources in the giant metropolitan complexes. We need to know more about why people migrate from one area to another. We need to know more about the human and natural resources that are currently available throughout rural communities of America. In short, we need a vast array of new data and theoretical explanations concerning the whys and hows of economic growth and population distribution.

This is one of the reasons why I think this conference is so valuable because one of its purposes is to encourage the dissemination of information and data that we now have and to emphasize the importance of future studies

and analyses and the continuing exchange of this information among both governmental and non-governmental groups which are interested in this whole question of rural economic development.

Now, in the concluding portion of my remarks, I want to identify some of the specific steps that I think should be taken as a part of this effort to revitalize our rural communities.

First, and most obvious, rural areas need more jobs. Unless we can actually begin to increase the number of jobs available in our rural communities, nothing else that we can do will have any meaningful or lasting effect. In this connection, I would just like to briefly mention the Rural Job Development bill introduced by Senator Harris and myself in July of this year. This bill provides a series of tax incentives designed to attract new job-creating industries into rural communities. I am, of course, pleased to note that the bill has been extremely well received in the Congress and we have been most encouraged by the expression of support we have received from all around the country. I am most hopeful that we can get early and favorable action on this piece of legislation.

Second, we must expand educational opportunities in rural areas, particularly those types of programs involving vocational-technical training. New industries can survive in rural communities only if they are able to count upon a skilled labor force.

Third, we need a better system of making credit available to business firms which are interested in developing a new enterprise in rural areas. The type of capital that is needed to finance new industries if often times simply not available outside the large metropolitan areas.

Fourth, we have got to substantially improve the quantity and quality of available housing. One of the first problems that smaller towns encounter in their efforts to attract new industry is a shortage of housing.

Fifth, the Federal Government must do a better job than it is now doing to achieving a more equitable geographical distribution in the spending and procurement programs. This is particularly important in regard to the awarding of research and development grants to the colleges and universities. The present pattern of distribution of funds actually tends to encourage the concentration of people, talent and economic resources in a relatively few areas. This is no reason whatsoever why more of these grants can't go to the small regional and community colleges. The strengthening of these institutions will have many indirect but important ramifications throughout the surrounding community.

Sixth, we must stop treating the problems of rural and urban areas as separate and distinct. Although manifested in different ways, the problems are interrelated and have common causes. Thus, it is essential that we develop more effective coordination of Federal Government programs--particularly those concerned with economic development and the reduction

of poverty.

And seventh, we must rededicate ourselves to a fresh, new effort to strengthen the institution of the family farm. I want to stress this point because a number of people who are stressing the need for a better rural-urban balance are saying that the continuing exodus from the farm cannot be stopped, and, in effect, I think, have written off the family farm as a viable institution. Now it would be neither possible or desirable to attempt to freeze the farm population at the present level, but to argue that we can't do anything to substantially alter the present trend is the very same type of economic fatalism which we have got to overcome if we are ever going to make any substantial progress toward a better rural-urban balance. We must strengthen the family farm not only because it is a valuable socio-economic institution but because it is the base on which so many of our smaller towns and cities depend.

These are some of the things that we need to do now. But as the debate on how to achieve a more sensible rural-urban balance continues, hopefully new proposals will be generated. And in this connection I would close by urging each and every one of you to renew your efforts on behalf of rural youth and to help stimulate discussion at the local level as to what individual citizens and private groups, as well as governmental agencies, can do to broaden the social and economic opportunities of rural America and thereby improve the quality of American society. Your work is absolutely vital to this whole effort and I believe you will be rewarded by your direct participation in meeting one of the most demanding, but also exciting, challenges of our time.